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TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM PREF BG  
SUBJECT: UNHCR REPORTS FURTHER PROGRESS ON ROHINGYAS

Classified By: Amb. Patricia A. Butenis for reasons 1.4(d)

¶1. SUMMARY (C) The government continues to take steps to improve conditions in the official Rohingya refugee camps, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Bangladesh. A government adviser made the first-ever minister-level visit to the camps in March. Meanwhile, the situation in the Teknaf settlement has stabilized for the moment. END SUMMARY.

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FIRST EVER MINISTER-LEVEL VISIT TO REFUGEE CAMP  
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¶2. (C) At the monthly coordinating meeting on March 25, UNHCR Bangladesh representative Pia Pritz-Phiri reported more progress on the issue of Rohingya refugee camps near Cox's Bazar in southeastern Bangladesh. She reported that Government Adviser Tapan Chowdhury, who oversees the Ministry for Food and Disaster Management, made the first-ever minister-level visit to a Rohingya refugee camp in March. He spent several hours touring the Nayapara camp with Pritz-Phiri, and was so upset by the poor conditions there that he insisted on meeting directly with the refugees.

¶3. (C) The ministry's new local refugee coordinator in Cox's Bazar later told UNHCR that Chowdhury had very strong words for the local government in a private meeting after his camp tour. The new coordinator said Chowdhury told them the refugees should have freedom of movement, and needed better education and work opportunities. Pritz-Phiri said she was highly encouraged by Chowdhury's visit, and hoped that momentum was building for a longer-term solution to the situation.

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TEKNAF SITUATION: IMMEDIATE CRISIS AVERTED  
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¶4. (C) Pritz-Phiri also provided an update on the situation in the ad hoc Rohingya settlement in Teknaf, south of Cox's Bazar. She said the government honored its pledge only to clear away shelters within 15 feet of the main road. (NOTE: This is part of the caretaker government's drive to demolish illegal structures on public roads.) She also confirmed that most displaced refugees had relocated to other parts of the settlement. Medicins sans Frontieres has been providing shelter equipment and water bottles, but UNHCR has not been

officially involved in the relief effort in Teknaf.

¶15. (C) Pritz-Phiri said a crisis in Teknaf had been averted for the moment, though with many Rohingyas relocating closer to the river bank, they were already "sleeping in mud." If the river level were to rise during the rainy season, the people closest to the river bank would be in danger. UNHCR has raised these concerns with Adviser Chowdhury.

BUTENIS